

## Explaining the REAL PRESENCE of Jesus in the Eucharist

The Catholic Church teaches that the bread & wine at Mass are NOT merely symbols for Jesus, but they truly become the body of Christ! They keep the appearance & taste of bread & wine, but the substance is changed into Christ Himself. In receiving the Eucharist, we unite ourselves to Him in a concrete way, becoming his very flesh and blood.

In order for a child to be considered ready for First Communion, the MOST IMPORTANT thing is for them to be able to distinguish between regular bread and the body of Christ that we receive in the Eucharist.

However, children who receive their First Communion are at ages where they think concretely and understand things in black-and-white terms. They still have difficulty thinking in the abstract. Our challenge is to help them understand some abstract concepts like transubstantiation (the bread & wine becoming the real body & blood of Jesus even though the appearance doesn't change), and why Jesus would offer Himself to us as food.

Some helpful ways to explain this to children:

Say, "When we celebrate Mass, a miracle happens! God changes the bread & wine so that they become the real body & blood of Jesus."

Say, "God does this miracle when the priest says the words of consecration: "this is my body" and "this is my blood." That is the most important moment at Mass, when Jesus becomes present in the bread & wine."

Say, "It still looks and tastes like bread & wine, but after the priest says the words of consecration it really becomes Jesus. It is really, really, really Jesus! Even if we can't see him, Jesus is there."

Say, "We believe it is really Jesus because that is what he told us (see John 6:48-58 & Matthew 26:26-28). Remember, Jesus is God and he can do anything, even change bread into his body!"

Say, "Why does Jesus become bread & wine? Because he loves us so much that he wants to be very close to us. Holy Communion is food that feeds our soul, just like regular bread feeds our body."

Say, "Receiving Jesus in Holy Communion is the most wonderful & special thing you can ever do! We should always thank Jesus for coming to us in this special way."

